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ABSTRACT

Designed for use as a reference and resource in program development by home economics extension staff, this report identifies national trends and educational needs of families in relation to extension programs for families. Changing population patterns, economic indicators, social structures, and health problems are discussed in terms of their effect on families in the 1980s. Outlined in the section of the report dealing with extension programming are areas of program emphasis relevant to the following issues: energy, family resource management, food and nutrition, health and safety, housing, human development and parenting, and public affairs. Priority audiences for extension home economics programs are identified. (MN)

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EXTENSION HOME ECONOMICS IN THE '80s

ISSUES — TRENDS — NEEDS

Extension Committee on Organization and Policy

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**A Report to the ECOP Home Economics Subcommittee by the
Task Force on National Trends and Family Educational Needs**

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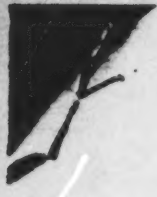
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CONTENTS

Introduction	3
National Trends Affecting Families	3
Major Issues	5
Energy	5
Family Resource Management	6
Food and Nutrition	6
Health and Safety	7
Housing	7
Human Development and Parenting	8
Public Affairs	9
Priority Audiences	10
Summary	10



INTRODUCTION

In November 1978, a Task Force was appointed by the ECGP Home Economics Subcommittee for the purpose of identifying national trends and educational needs of families in relation to Extension programs for families. The Task Force assignments included development of a paper exploring trends and identifying major issues, problems, missions, objectives, program emphases and priority audiences.

This paper is the product of the Task Force effort. It is intended to be used as a reference and resource in program development by Extension staff.

In preparing the paper, the Task Force drew upon studies that have been conducted both within Extension and by other groups. Consideration was given to relevant information from many available sources. Individual states are encouraged to adapt and expand this material to meet their own program development needs.

Extension programs assist people to identify needs, to make decisions, and to utilize resources

to improve the quality of home and community living. The unique partnership of the U.S. Department of Agriculture, State Land-Grant Colleges and Universities, and county government provides flexibility for the Cooperative Extension Service to design programs responsive to the needs of local people.

A recognized strength of the Cooperative Extension Service is the involvement of individuals and families in program development at the local level. Effective programs result from careful planning and interaction between Extension professionals and clientele.

Knowledge of national and local trends and issues affecting families is necessary for developing and maintaining viable, dynamic home economics educational programs.

This paper discusses national trends and related issues, program emphases, and emerging priority audiences for Extension home economics programs in the 1980s.

NATIONAL TRENDS AFFECTING FAMILIES*

Population

The U.S. population of 219,530,000 (January 1, 1979) represents an increase of 0.8 percent over the previous year. The rate of increase has slowed during the seventies. The greatest population increase has occurred among young adults (age 25-34) and those 65 and older. There are more women than men, and women tend to live longer. The median age of the population has increased by nearly 2 years since 1970.

The 1978 birth rate of 15.2 per 1,000 represented a slight increase over the 1976 rate of 14.7, which was the lowest in U.S. history. The birth rate is not expected to rise significantly over the next decade.

Young adults are delaying both marriage and parenthood, and are choosing alternate lifestyles.

*Throughout this section, trends have been discussed in general terms with minimal use of numbers and percentages, which quickly become obsolete as new reports are issued.

Economic Indicators

Although median family income continues to increase, real income and purchasing power of the family/household has averaged about the same since 1973 due to inflation. Taxes are taking a larger share of personal income and are increasing faster than the prices of goods and services.

More family members are working for pay. In January 1979, more than 60 percent of all women ages 18-49 were in the labor force, and 49 percent of married women were working. The earnings of full time women workers in 1975 were 59 percent of full time male workers' earnings. Households with no husband present have a median family income of less than one-half that of all husband-wife households. Households with heads 65 years of age and older had the lowest median income among age groups.

The percentage of total population with incomes below the poverty level has decreased in recent years, but this percentage remains higher

for blacks and those of Hispanic origin than for whites. Unemployment is greatest among youth and is higher for minorities than for whites.

The increased incidence of dual paycheck families and employed single-parent families has resulted in a growing need for viable child care alternatives.

The use of credit continues high, and savings are declining as a percent of total income. Housing, including mortgage or rent payments, household operation and furnishings, takes a larger percentage of family income than any other expenditure. In 1979, households spent an average of about 15 percent of before-tax income on food.

Social Structure

The number of households in the United States has increased about three times as rapidly as the population, and nearly one-quarter of households are composed of individuals living alone, or with non-relatives. The average size of households and families has decreased over the past decade. Although the number of two-person households shared by an unrelated man and woman is increasing, these households comprise only 1 percent of the total number of households.

The marriage rate has risen by 3 percent during the past 3 years but remains below the 1970 rate. The divorce rate has changed very little since 1971 and is now 5.1 per 1,000 population.

Geographic mobility is greatest among young people. Nonmetro counties have experienced a net population increase, with more people moving to the South and West. Farm population has declined to less than 4 percent of the total population, with only about one out of 28 people now living on a farm.

There is an increasing tendency among young married people to delay having children, and the concepts of childless marriage and delayed child-bearing are gaining acceptance. This is only one indication of an increasing focus on self-fulfillment.

The increased number of children enrolled in nursery schools and kindergartens indicates that the educational function of the family is being supplemented by community institutions.

Reports indicate an increase in numbers of births to unmarried women.

The status and role of women continues to change as more women seek additional education and are employed in a variety of occupations.

The educational level of the population continues to increase, particularly among minorities. About one-fourth of the population in the 25-34 year age group in 1978 were college graduates.

Health

Life expectancy has reached a record high, and women continue to have a longer life expectancy than men. Lower birth rates and an increasing median age are resulting in an increasing concentration of population in the young adult (20-34) and over 65 age group.

Heart disease is the leading cause of death in the United States, followed by cancer and cerebrovascular disease.

Health care costs continue to increase more than any other service, and many families are cutting back on health-related expenditures as a result of inflation.

Obesity is the most common nutritional disorder in the United States. Estimates of the percentage of adults who are significantly overweight vary from 20-40 percent.

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MAJOR ISSUES

Relevant Extension programming must take into account the national trends affecting families and must address current issues demanding high-priority consideration from families and the communities where they live. The Task Force has identified the following high-priority issues that seem appropriate for major home economics program thrusts.

ENERGY

In today's highly industrialized society, the availability of energy greatly influences the availability of goods and services, of employment, and of quality of life in the home, community and nation.

The family shapes the future through its everyday decisions. The combination of these decisions forms a lifestyle and adds to the larger decisions of society.

To the consumer, energy use is a means and not an end in itself; that is, some tasks require energy consumption to complete them. Solutions must be approached from this perspective. Energy implications are present in all aspects of family living. Conservation must come from the application of energy saving measures in the food and fiber system and in housing, household operation and transportation. To do this, families need information that will help them make sound decisions about the use of energy and the application of new, cost effective technologies that have potential for lower energy use. Conservation practices will become more attractive as the cost of energy increases.

Changes will be gradual. Changes in applied technology will occur more rapidly than changes

in habits. To effect lasting changes in energy consumption, attitudinal and value changes must occur resulting in reduced consumption and reevaluation of lifestyles. New technologies that are less energy intensive must be developed, demonstrated and implemented.

Areas of Concern

- Lack of understanding and acceptance of energy facts and issues, and lack of credibility of much of the information
- Excessive and wasteful use of energy in America
- Rapid increases in the cost of energy and the long-range outlook for continued increases
- Lack of understanding of alternative energy sources and their environmental, social and economic costs

Areas of Program Emphases

- Developing positive attitudes toward a less energy intensive lifestyle
- Reducing energy consumption in family living by improving consumer and management skills in selection, maintenance, use and conservation of goods and services for personal and household consumption
- Increasing knowledge and understanding of alternative energy sources and costs
- Understanding the concept of lifetime costs in relation to home appliances and other equipment
- Increasing knowledge of values to be received by buying energy efficient products
- Reducing energy requirements in housing

through weatherization and remodeling of existing housing and construction of more energy-efficient new housing

- Increasing participation in local government and in community actions to bring about more efficient use of energy at the macro level

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FAMILY RESOURCE MANAGEMENT

Inflation has increased the magnitude of economic, management and consumer problems since 1973 and is expected to continue into the eighties.

Individuals and families will need to improve knowledge, skills and practices to maintain economic stability and security throughout life; to effectively manage human, manmade and natural resources; and to be proficient consumers of goods and services for personal and household use.

Areas of Concern

- Impact of continuing inflation, rising costs of goods and services, and increasing taxes on lifestyles and quality of life
- Insufficient resources to provide the level of living families need or want
- Inadequate financial planning and management to supply economic needs throughout the life cycle
- Lack of knowledge about laws and regulations affecting the family/household (i.e., credit, consumer protection, property descent, divorce, employment, day care, social security, medicare, death and burial, etc.)
- Unrealistic goals in relation to human and financial resources available
- Increasing proportion of income allocated to consumer installment and mortgage debt and decreasing proportion of income saved and/or invested
- Attitudes of entitlement, dependency and loss of control over one's life

Areas of Program Emphases

- Allocating income between spending, borrowing, saving, protecting, investing and sharing to provide needs and wants throughout the life cycle
- Managing human, manmade and natural resources to reach individual, and family/household economic and social goals; learning and applying management principles and processes to reach these goals
- Increasing knowledge about consumer behavior, the economic system, the marketplace, and consumer rights and responsibilities

FOOD AND NUTRITION

Nutrition affects the health of every individual from the time of conception to death. Eating patterns are constantly changing and are influenced by many factors, including food prices, family income, food advertising and marketing, convenience of preparation and family lifestyles.

Areas of Concern

- Inadequate nutrition has been identified as one possible contributing factor to coronary heart disease, cancer, high blood pressure, diabetes mellitus, dental caries and liver disease. The incidence of some of these diseases may be related to the fact that the consumption of fat and sweeteners has increased significantly over the past 50 years while there has been a concomitant decrease in consumption of complex carbohydrates.
- Intakes of salt and alcohol are excessive for some individuals.
- Obesity is prevalent, with an estimated 20-40 percent of adults significantly overweight.
- A wide gap exists between what people know about diet and what they practice.
- Food costs continue to rise, although the percentage of income spent for food has remained about the same.
- Consumers are subjected to a wide range of nutrition information, some of which is lacking in accuracy.

Areas of Program Emphases

- Helping people understand their own and their families' nutritional needs at different stages of the life cycle and different levels of activity (The role of nutrition in maintenance of health should be included.)
- Increasing understanding of how to select food from the wide range of available choices; the influence on food habits of advertising, eating in restaurants, and family members working outside the home; improvement of food shopping skills, and the desirability of forming good eating patterns early in life
- Increasing understanding of what happens to food between farm and table and the economic factors affecting food supply
- Improving the ability of consumers to select less expensive alternatives that meet the same nutritional needs as more expensive food items
- Improving food safety practices in food preparation, storage and preservation
- Helping people move from understanding to adoption of good nutrition practices
- Providing reliable, research-based information to people

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HEALTH AND SAFETY

Rapidly escalating health care costs, coupled with the growing realization that the major physical and mental health problems killing and disabling Americans today are chronic in nature and not amenable to quick and easy treatment, are causing people to want to take more responsibility for their own health care.

Areas of Concern

- The national cost of health care in 1976 was \$139 billion. In the early 1980s, it is estimated that annual health care costs will have risen to between \$233 and \$249 billion.

- Heart disease, cancer, stroke and accidents account for nearly three-fourths of all deaths in the United States. All of these are subject to some measure of control through altering lifestyles, improving the environment, and increasing understanding of genetics and heredity.
- Some individuals over-utilize health services while others postpone use of these services until it is too late.
- More consumer input is needed in health services planning.

Areas of Program Emphases

- Helping people develop a sense of the value of health and increase motivation to take responsibility for their own health
- Seeing that people know where health services are available and how to use these services appropriately
- Teaching appropriate use of OTC drugs and prescribed medications, and the possible consequences of improper use
- Helping people participate in health activities and continue to learn what constitutes and contributes to wellness
- Helping communities plan health services that will provide maximum benefit for resources invested
- Promoting safety in the home

Reference

Health Education in the Cooperative Extension Service: Present Status and Recommendations for Future Action. Report of the ECOP Subcommittee on Health Education, March 1978, p. 12.

HOUSING

The rapid rise in the cost of housing as compared with increasing family incomes has become a major problem for many families. The American dream of an individually owned, single-family home is now beyond the reach of an increasing number of individuals and families.

Areas of Concern

- The median price of a home increased by nearly 15 percent in the one-year period between September 1977 and September

1978. By 1981, the average price of a new single family home is expected to rise to \$78,000.

- Interest rates have been increasing rapidly, and lenders have become more cautious in making home loans.
- In 1976, 5.1 million homes were overcrowded and/or lacked complete plumbing. Forty-four percent of these were located in nonmetro areas.
- Costs of utilities and home repairs have escalated and now are making up a larger share of total housing costs.

Areas of Program Emphases

- Understanding and evaluating housing alternatives, including apartments, condominiums, manufactured homes, group living situations and remodeling existing housing
- Developing ways to improve energy efficiency of household equipment and new and existing housing
- Financing alternatives for home purchasers, including applicable government programs
- Acquiring self-help skills relating to home improvements and furnishings
- Selecting and caring for furnishings and household equipment for maximum durability, attractiveness and comfort
- Recognizing the importance of safe and satisfying housing in optimum development of the occupants

Reference

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HUMAN DEVELOPMENT AND PARENTING

The traditional family unit is continuing to undergo major change. Public policy makers are becoming more aware of the impact of public policies on family structure and function. High mobility, changing views of societal norms, and media emphasis on individual gratification create greater need for assistance to the family in acquiring the skills needed for satisfying living. The awakening awareness of life span growth and development accentuates the need for assistance

to families in their understanding of the concept of the individual within the family. The family remains the primary source for nurturing of family members.

Areas of Concern

- The population of the U.S. will continue to grow over the next several decades. The birth rate is projected to remain at the lower rate of 15.2 per 1,000 as reported in 1978; however, larger numbers of young adults are reaching adulthood and producing children, resulting in increased population.
- Although the dependency ratio (the number of dependent people under 18 and over 64, per 100 active people ages 18-64) has not changed in recent years, the dependent population has aged dramatically. In 1900, there were 10 youths under age 18 for every person 65 or older; by 1977, there were only three youths for each person 65 and over.
- The number of children with working mothers is likely to continue to increase. The 1976 labor force participation rate of mothers of children under 6 was 37.4 percent with husbands present. The number of all mothers of children under 6 entering the labor force has increased by 65 percent since 1965.
- The proportion of ever-married women, 20-24 years of age, without children rose from 24 percent in 1960 to 42 percent in 1976. The percentage of ever-married women, ages 25-29, without children increased from 13 percent in 1960 to 22 percent in 1976.
- The elderly population (65 years and older) is projected to grow to 34 million by 2010 and to 52 million by 2030. The proportion of elderly to total population was 10.7 percent in 1976 and is projected to reach 14-22 percent by 2030, depending on future fertility behavior. Increased numbers of elderly are living with non-relatives or independently.

Areas of Program Emphases

- Increasing understanding of life span growth and development needs
- Developing of parenting education programs with special emphases on the employed parent, the single parent, the adolescent parent and parents of handicapped children
- Developing of marriage enrichment programs with emphases on role changes,

communication, individual and family values and goals

- Helping families cope with the effects of outside pressures
- Developing of programs for persons facing major economic and/or social adjustments, such as divorce, displacement, death of a spouse, or family abuse
- Helping families develop skills to influence the public policy issues that impact on the family unit
- Providing programs that help develop skills for remaining self-sufficient in the retirement years

PUBLIC AFFAIRS

Public affairs education is concerned with the processes and functions of government. The quality of life for American families is significantly affected by the quality of government. At the same time, the quality of government in a democracy depends upon the intelligent participation of citizens.

Extension has a long history in public affairs programming. It offers an in-place resource for increasing the family's understanding of public issues and education for citizen participation. The function of public affairs education is to teach people so they can analyze public issues on the basis of objective facts and principles. It is the prerogative of the people themselves to make their own decisions on public affairs issues and express them as they consider important.

Public affairs education needs to become an integral part of Extension programming for families within each state and throughout the country.

Areas of Concern

- Understanding of public policy decision making processes that affect well-being of families
- Personal confidence for approaching/relating to public officials and their staff, at all levels
- Reaching and developing women and women's groups for potential community leadership
- Knowledge of written and human resources needed for public affairs educational programming for families
- Understanding of role and necessity of citizen participation in public decision making

- Awareness of Extension's relationship to other government agencies and the budget process
- Knowledge and understanding of specific public affairs issues facing families

Areas of Program Emphases

- Improving the capacity of the Extension agent to develop and deliver educational programs in public affairs for families
- Determining and providing appropriate educational experiences for Extension agents to improve their capacity to add a public affairs dimension to their programs
- Identifying, developing and evaluating educational materials useful to agents in educational programming
- Improving the performance of our democratic institutions by contributing to the understanding of problems and issues in public policies for families
- Increasing involvement by families in public decision making which impacts directly on designated populations
- Initiating policy or policy changes supportive to the well-being of families: support systems for families with special needs; human and material resource allocation, including energy conservation, individual and family income, population; nutritional status of individuals; costs, availability and quality of housing, food safety and quality; and consumer protection.

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PRIORITY AUDIENCES

Extension home economics programs will continue to be directed toward the practical informational needs of families, recognizing that these needs are changing along with the social, economic and political settings in which people live. Greater effort will be required to package and deliver information in the most usable form for specifically identified audiences.

Some population groups are emphasized as high-priority audiences, either because of their unique needs and the intensity of their problems,

or because of their sheer numbers and proportion in the total population. Among those audiences who have been singled out because of their needs and problems are low-income families, older adults, minorities and the handicapped. Young families are a particularly important audience because of the number of persons in their population group and the life-influencing management decisions that are required during this stage of the family life cycle.

SUMMARY

This paper has identified and briefly discussed some of the social and economic trends having significant impacts on families at the beginning of the decade of the eighties. Other trends may also have great influence on family and community life in particular states and regions.

Issues and problems likely to affect the directions of home economics Extension programs in the eighties have been outlined. The

degree to which these programs are responsive to perceived family and social needs will help to determine program support. Competition among public agencies for funds and responsibility will continue to increase. Only well-managed programs with a broad base of public support will survive. Home economics Extension programs have both an opportunity and a challenge.

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